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Surveillance Of CIA

PAST EFFORTS to bring the Central Intelligence Agency under some meaningful scrutiny by Congress have not gotten far. Those who espouse the CIA's viewpoint have thwarted such moves. One argument is that the CIA's efforts as a highly secret undertaking would be crippled if Congress were to ask embarrassing questions.

This argument has come up against some arguments which, in our judgment, are more valid. The CIA is being called increasingly into question for its evident dabbling in foreign policy. Some of its clandestine operations are demonstrably for the purpose of gathering intelligence and sometimes constitute interference in the internal affairs of other nations.

This imperils the national interest of the United States. The fact that little is known about CIA operations, so that observers are forced into the murky waters of conjecture, is in itself dangerous. Secret or not, the CIA should in reasonable measure be subject to the same rule that applies to all federal agencies: it is the public's business, and the public has a right to know what it is up to.

It is against this background that on January 11 two current attempts, by Senators Frank Church and Eugene J. McCarthy, to assert the Congressional right of surveillance over the CIA and other agencies. Sen. McCarthy would clear the way with a "full and complete study," to be made by the Foreign Relations subcommittee, of how the CIA affects U.S. foreign relations. Young wants Congress to set up a permanent joint Senate-House committee to keep an eye on the intelligence agency. Both proposals have merit, and the first might indeed provide valuable guidelines for operation of a committee. Discreetly handled, surveillance by such a committee would not hurt the CIA and might keep it from getting out of control.